

# THESE TWAIN

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# THESE TWAIN

WILLIS JOHN LEE  
MARY JENNET LEE

*By*

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“His substance is not here:  
For what you see is but the smallest part,  
And least proportion of humanity;  
But were the whole frame here,  
It is of such a spacious, lofty pitch,  
Your roof were not sufficient to contain it.”

—*Henry VI.*

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## FOREWORD

This volume is the work of love. No other motive has entered into its making. The writers were intimates of "These Twain", and so make their contribution, of devotion and esteem, from personal observation and experience. The First Chapter is by W. E. McClenny, Suffolk, Va., a historian of note, author of "The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly" and other historical publications. For years he was in the employ of "These Twain", and as such was ever a welcome guest in their home. The Second Chapter is by Ex-Congressman, Col. E. E. Holland, President Farmer's Bank of Nansemond, Suffolk, Va., and a brother-in-law of Willis John Lee. He greatly admired, and in turn was held in highest esteem by, "These Twain". The Third Chapter is by their honored and beloved friend, Rev. W. W. Staley, D. D., pastor emeritus, Suffolk Christian Church, and was their spiritual adviser on many sacred occasions and was often a visitor and always a welcome guest in the home of "These Twain". The Fourth Chapter is by one who learned to love "These Twain" as his own parents, for, admitted to the sanctity of their home through marriage to their niece, who was as their only daughter, he owes to their gentleness, their refinement, their sense of honor, their loyalty to God and love to mankind, a debt of gratitude he can never pay.

J. O. ATKINSON.

## I. HISTORY

“This human mind wrote history and this must read it. The Sphinx must solve her own riddle. If the whole of history is in one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience.”

—*Emerson.*

### WILLIS JOHN LEE

It cannot at this time be told with certainty the name of the first Lee who landed in Nansemond, as there were several that came over about 1635, and a few years later.

The ancestor of the Lee family from which the subject of this sketch was descended settled on what was thought to be the southern border of Nansemond County, Virginia, in the last years of the seventeenth century, taking up land by grant on both sides of the Virginia-North Carolina line as surveyed in 1728, near where that line crosses the Somerton Swamp. By that survey most of the land taken up by this ancestor was cut off into North Carolina. From 1728 to 1759 that section was a part of old Chowan County, and from 1759 to 1779 it was a part of Hertford County, and after 1779 it became a part of the new county of Gates. After the family had been seated in that locality for over a century, his grandfather, John Rochelle Lee, moved to that part of the original Lee estate that lay in Nansemond County, Virginia, and became a prominent citizen of that section of Nanse-

mond, and his descendants also have taken prominent places and have held them to the present day.

Willis John Lee was born in Holy Neck District of Nansemond County, Virginia, January 12th, 1846. He was the first son of Captain Patrick Henry Lee and his wife, Joanna Rawles, both life long residents of Nansemond County. Captain P. H. Lee (born December 2nd, 1823; died May 30th, 1907,) was the son of John R. Lee, (born in 1801; died September 12th, 1865), and his wife Mary Ann Griffin Wise Everett Lee, her father being Elisha Everett, and her mother being Mary Ann Griffin, this marriage taking place in 1804. She was sister to one Thomas Everett. John R. Lee and Mary Ann Griffin Wise Everett were married in 1820, when the bride was fifteen years old. John R. Lee and his wife had the following children: (1) Alfred Thomas, who never married, (2) John P. Lee, who never married, (3) Elisha E. Lee, who married Elizabeth Virginia Gaskins, (4) Patrick Henry Lee, who married Joanna Rawles, (5) Sarah E. Lee, who married Alexander Savage, (6) Virginia A. Lee, who married Jonas W. Lawrence, (7) Judson Lee, who was a Confederate soldier and was killed in the War between the States. At the time of his death John R. Lee owned about 1200 acres of land, besides considerable other property.

About the childhood and youth of Willis John Lee we know very little except that he was the eldest

of a large family of children, as follows:

Pattie J. Lee married Prof. W. M. Jones.

Anna Lee married a Beaton, and died young.

Albert T. Lee married Mary Copeland.

Bettie J. Lee married A. L. Gardner.

Isaac P. Lee never married.

Emma W. Lee married Joseph P. Gay.

S. Otelia Lee married Edward E. Holland.

The family was reared in the country home of the father on the road from Holland to Holy Neck Church in Nansemond County, Va., under the watchful care of their parents, parental authority being respected. They attended the "old field" schools of the day, acquiring the rudiments of an education before going from home for further schooling. Just as Willis J. Lee was old enough to develop in learning the war of 1861-65 broke out in all of its fury, and he went to the colors in defense of what he thought to be right, and when he returned home the time for school was over with him.

When Virginia called for her sons to serve her, on May 14th, 1861, although he was only fifteen years old, he was mustered in the Confederate service as a member of Company "I" of the 13th Virginia Cavalry, commanded at that time by his father, Captain Patrick H. Lee, who remained in command until he was disabled. Later the company was commanded by Captain Alexander Savage, his aunt's husband,

who finally became Colonel of the regiment. In this same company were his uncles, Elisha E. Lee, A. T. Lee and Thomas J. Lee. This shows that the family was patriotic.

This company and regiment soon became one of the crack cavalry commands in the Confederate army, and was known far and near for the loyalty and bravery of its men. With his command he endured all of the hardships of army life in the field for four years, taking part in many of the fiercest engagements of the war until the army of Northern Virginia, outnumbered, laid down their arms on the fatal field of Appomattox Court House, and they were paroled. The command had been in the Peninsular campaign around Williamsburg, at Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Brandy Station, and many other engagements. He thus became a veteran at the early age of nineteen years. He was, however, a Southerner through and through the remainder of his life. (The roster of his company is now on file in the Nansemond County Clerk's Office.)

When the Tom Smith Camp of Confederate Veterans was organized in Suffolk he became a member, and remained one as long as he lived. (Well does the writer remember filling up his application to become a member of this organization for him. All were agreed that he had been a model soldier,



and the camp was highly pleased to have him as one of their comrades.)

His later business career brought him on intimate terms with many of his former comrades in arms, among whom we mention Col. Walter H. Taylor, Gen. R. E. Lee's trusted Adjutant, Cols. E. M. Henry, James Jasper Phillips, Alexander Savage and Thomas W. Smith, and many others. He was always delighted to meet with an old comrade whom he had not seen for a long time, and have a word about their experiences.

When the war was over he returned home, and soon went to the turpentine woods of Georgia where his father was engaged in the turpentine and naval stores business on a large scale, and remained about two years; then he returned to Virginia and bought a plantation in the Lower Parish of Nansemond County, and engaged in farming, devoting most of his attention to raising truck for the northern markets.

On the 25th day of May, 1869, he was married to Mary Jennet Jones, at the home of her father, by Rev. William B. Wellons. For some years they made their home on his farm, known as "The Creek Farm", on Bennett Creek, and later he engaged in the mercantile business and had a cotton gin on this farm.

Later they moved to the large Town Point Farm on Nansemond River, which adjoins his first farm, and soon this became one of the best truck farms in

the county. Everything was kept in order, and the mark "Town Point Farm" on a package of truck on the northern markets was known to the trade, and often his produce was sold before it arrived at the docks, as everybody knew what his marks meant as to quality. He owned and operated a fleet of vessels in the oyster business in which he was engaged, and when that season was over, his vessels were busy running his truck to Norfolk.

By 1895 they had erected on this, one of the most historic spots in Nansemond, the first country home in the county to have all of the modern conveniences, and there they spent the years together until the grim reaper claimed the husband in 1919. At the time their home was erected it was the largest and most up to date country residence in the whole section of country. In that home a welcome awaited the relatives and friends, and there was a certain feeling of sanctity not often felt in the modern home. Here Mr. Lee spent the remainder of his years looking after his varied interests.

When they began the journey of life together the great war had been over only a few years, and they had to adapt themselves to the hardships of the times, but they did it cheerfully. Having no children of their own, they both were very fond of children, and always had some around them. One of Mrs. Lee's nieces (now Mrs. J. O. Atkinson) made her home with

them all the time, and it was a rare thing that a week passed that there were not other nieces and nephews visiting in the home. Both seemed happiest when surrounded by children, and the old schoolhouse at the walnut tree stands as a silent sentinel to their interest in the education of the children in their vicinity, for it was in this house that they provided a teacher for the children, those in their own home and those of the community, their home being the home of the teachers the greater part of the time.

Others have told of their attitude toward their church and her institutions. Suffice it to say that the first time the writer ever saw Mr. Willis J. Lee to know who he was, was at Elon College at the commencement of 1893, when the financial agent, Dr. W. T. Herndon, of the college, asked for funds to finish the building. The first man to rise in the audience to make a donation was Willis J. Lee, and from that time to the day of his death we knew him to be loyal and generous to his church and her institutions, and in this he was encouraged by his devoted wife.

He was a man of large affairs, full of energy to the last and always believed in having the best on his large farm that could be made in his community. He had the happy faculty of drawing to him loyal people, and no man ever rejoiced more in the success of the men and boys who had been in his employment than he did. If he found one that was willing to help

himself, he always stood ready, and it appeared to be a pleasure for him to aid them on the road to success. Mr. and Mrs. Lee had one quality that is somewhat rare, viz.: they did not look upon those who were in their employ as mere hirelings, but treated them as members of the family. (Since beginning this study it has been observed that many of the young men who worked for them were their distant kin, but they made no exceptions). Many times has the writer heard him, on getting to the field where a great many of his hands were at work, the first thing he would say would be "Good morning, our folks" in a pleasant tone.

But the thing most impressive was whenever there were some of the people who had been his faithful employees and had fallen sick and he thought they were in need, he would never stop, no matter how busy he was, until he had satisfied himself that they were provided for. This was done when it appeared that he could never be repaid. This has been observed, not once, nor twice, but often.

About three years before his death his health began to fail, yet his strong constitution held up well until May 20th, 1919, when he joined his comrades gone before and went over the river to rest under the shade of the trees, and his body was laid to rest in Cedar Hill Cemetery, Suffolk, Virginia, surrounded by a host of his relatives and friends.

Since that date Mrs. Mary Jennet Lee, his faithful wife, has carried on the work that they had been carrying on together for fifty years lacking five days, and her deeds of charity and mercy, like those of Dorcas of old, are known far and near, and many there are who feel that her life and that of her husband are like sign boards pointing to that which is highest, holiest and best in this present life, and to a life of eternal bliss in the world to come.

### MRS. MARY JENNET (JONES) LEE

Mrs. Mary Jennet (Jones) Lee was born June 2nd, 1850, the daughter of William Henry Jones, Sr., (born March 14th, 1816; died August 28th, 1895), and his first wife, who was Miss Jennet Copeland (born December 10th, 1820; died June 2nd, 1850). Her father and mother were married February 22nd, 1842, by Rev. Uriah Rawles. Mrs. Lee was born in Johnston County, N. C., where her parents lived at the time, but soon afterwards was carried back to Holy Neck District of Nansemond County, Virginia, where her ancestors on both sides had been residents since the early days of the colony.

Her father, William Henry Jones, Sr., was the son of Andrew Jones and his wife, Mary, or Polly (Johnson) Jones. Her father was a man of strong personality, and held important positions of trust in his day.

He was a member of the militia for one year in the War between the States, and was later appointed a judge of the court in the state of Georgia, where he was living in 1864. In young manhood he embarked in the mercantile business at Holy Neck, but was not successful, and finally had to close up, being in debt at the time. He then went to Georgia and engaged in the turpentine and naval stores business, being associated with Capt. Patrick H. Lee. He there met with success before the war of 1861-65, and when the war came on they had a large stock of raw turpentine on hand, which was emptied into pits dug for that purpose and then those pits were covered with pine tags to conceal it. When the war was over, this stock was taken up and distilled and sent to the northern markets where the demand was so great, and the price so high, that it appeared that they would load a schooner with naval stores and send the cargo to New York, and she would return loaded with money. After a few years he, with his family, moved back to Virginia and bought a large farm near the Somerton Friends' Meeting House in Nansemond, and there reared his family, and devoted the remainder of his life to agriculture and looking after his other business interests.

One characteristic of him was his honor. When he returned to Virginia it is said that the first thing he did was to go around to his former creditors and



pay them off in full with interest from the time the liabilities were made. (This has been related not by the family, but by outsiders). The Jones family always stood for the highest ideals in honor, and this was but one outcropping of it.

His wife, Mrs. Jennet Jones, died at the time of the birth of Mrs. Mary Jennet Lee, leaving her a day old babe, and a brother, Benjamin Franklin Jones (born September 11th, 1845) motherless. The infant was taken by her maternal grandmother, Mrs. Mary or Polly Porter she was then (she having married a Porter after the death of her first husband), who tenderly cared for her. The babe was very weak and cried to nurse its mother. The old lady, whose youngest child was about grown, allowed the babe to nurse her, and strange as it may seem, she soon began to feed it from her own breast in the natural way, and continued until it was old enough to wean. This was regarded by the family as a kind of miracle. (This story has been verified by the evidence of reliable people now living.)

On January 23rd, 1851, William H. Jones, Sr., was remarried to Emma Copeland (born January 11th, 1822; died September 30th, 1882), by Rev. Robert Rawles, in Gates County, North Carolina. She was the sister of his first wife, and to this union five children were born: Samora Adelia, March 4th, 1854; Thomas A., June 12, 1856; Susanna, June 28th, 1859;

William Henry, Jr., October 13th, 1861; and Robert E., March 16th, 1864. These were half brothers and sisters to Mrs. Mary Jennet Lee.

About 1885 Mr. Jones married Miss Sue Turner, and to this union one daughter, Ruth, was born.

[Note: The Jones family is an old one. David Jones, the first, married Zilphia Rawles, sister of Hardy Rawles, from whom the vestry of the Upper Parish of Nansemond bought the land upon which the first Episcopal Chapel of ease was erected at Holy Neck in 1747. His sons were: Andrew Jones, who married Miss Mary or Polly Johnson, and they were the parents of William H. Jones, Sr., James Rawles Jones and Dempsey Jones. Andrew Jones was a soldier in the War of 1812, in Capt. David Duke's Company of the 59th regiment of Virginia militia. David, second, whose sons were Joseph D. Jones, a Baptist minister, and David Jones, third. Allen Jones, whose son John Jones was the father of Mrs. Sallie V. Jones, the widow of William H. Jones, Jr.]

Mrs. Lee's mother, Jennet Copeland, was the daughter of Thomas Copeland and his wife Mary or Polly Shepherd, and their home was near Holy Neck Church in Nansemond County, at what is now known as the Dempsey Jones Place. Her maternal grandfather, Thomas Copeland, came from a family long residents of the county, and his family had been members of the Society of Friends since the days of the



visit to Virginia of George Fox in 1672. Thomas Copeland's father was James Copeland and he married Mary Folk, sometimes spelled Faulk, she being the sister of William Folk, and perhaps a daughter or granddaughter of John Folk, who on July 25, 1746, obtained a grant or patent for 754 acres of land on the north side of the Somerton Swamp in Nansemond County. A Friend's log meeting house stood on this tract until about 1835. James Copeland's father, it appears, was John Copeland.

Her grandfather, Thomas Copeland, was a very particular man, a silversmith by trade, also a farmer. He made him a blank book, bound it in home tanned sheep skin, and for years kept a diary of what happened in his community. In the same book he kept his accounts, and his family record. Many of the events recorded in that book can be placed and it is valuable owing to the fact that all our county records were burned in 1866. The book is now in the possession of his great grandchildren, and has been carefully examined by the writer.

Her maternal grandmother, Mary or Polly Shepherd, was born in Pasquotank County, North Carolina. (She died October 16th, 1880, falling at the well). Her mother's maiden name was Pritchard.

Mrs. Mary Jennet Lee was educated at the local schools of the day, which were poor on account of the raging war; and later she attended Chowan

Female Baptist Institute, at Murfreesboro, N. C. Well is it remembered how proud her brother and half brothers and sisters were of her when she returned home from that school after she had finished.

It can at once be seen from what has been given above that the subject of this sketch had a good background upon which to build her life. On the father's side for generations, honor, energy, and integrity were a part of their very existence. And they did not leave out the spiritual side of life, but were regular attendants upon the church services, and always ready to lend a helping hand to the work of the church when it was needed. From her maternal side was the gentleness of the Friends Society, with their quiet and peaceable habits of life, filled with thrift, and under the leadership of the spirit, economical and charitable, and in addition to this she had been trained in a school where the thought of God and the higher things of life were not neglected.

With these qualifications for a useful life she, on the 25th day of May, 1869, at her father's home, became the bride of Willis J. Lee, the ceremony being performed by Rev. William B. Wellons in the presence of a gathering of kinsfolk, friends and neighbors, as was the custom at that day.

An incident of Mrs. Lee's girlhood days is of interest. She had an admirer, who was not acquainted with her father, and going to her home one day to

take her for a ride, behind two spirited steeds, and a fine buggy or phaeton, the first person he saw was the father dressed in his farm garb, and the first thing he said after the salutation of the day was: "Old man, won't you hold my horses a moment?" to which Mr. Jones replied he would. When he and Miss Jennet came from the house to the buggy, the beau thanked him, and asked him if he could not open the gate for him, which he did, and as the young man passed him at the gate he handed him "a quarter", and Mr. Jones gave it a good look. When they returned from the ride he was not present, but he soon saw his daughter, and his words were something like these: "Here, Jennie, you take this (handing her the quarter) and you give it back to him the next time you see him. He will need it, and if you cannot keep him away from here in the future I can. Those horses were borrowed, and I know it." That young man had made a fatal mistake.



## II. HOME

“The Heavens forbid  
But that our loves and comforts should increase,  
Even as our days do grow.”

—*Shakespeare.*

The span of life is short and uncertain. Many pass, as it were, “a mere watch in the night”, and are soon forgotten. Fortunately, this is not true of all. Now and then one is found who has so touched and influenced the lives of others that he is not forgotten. Such an one was the late Willis J. Lee, and such an one will be his widow when she too passes on and enters the portals of the Great Hereafter. To me has been assigned the task—if it should be called a task—of preparing a short sketch of their “Home Life”—a task for which I am all unequal, although my long acquaintance with them, my frequent visits to their home and my love and affection for them might ordinarily qualify me therefor.

Willis J. Lee was the eldest son of Captain P. H. Lee and Joanna Rawles, his wife, of Nansemond County, Virginia, and from them he inherited many of the traits afterwards so prominent in his own life. When a mere youth, he entered the Confederate Army, where he was esteemed by his comrades as a brave and faithful soldier. Continuing in the service until the close of the war, he was deprived of educational

advantages which otherwise he might have enjoyed. A few years after returning to his home, he made the most fortunate venture of his life in his marriage to M. Jennet Jones, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of William H. Jones, a prominent planter of the same county, and from that date until his death she was "the queen of his life and the idol of his love". After his marriage, he purchased a farm on Bennett's Creek, in said county, and engaged in farming with splendid success. Subsequently, he purchased what is known as "Town Point", a fine estate on Nansemond River, and built on its banks a beautiful and commodious home. This home was ever afterwards his sanctuary, a shrine made sacred by his association with friends and with his loved ones.

He was an honest, industrious, unselfish, independent, hardworking man. His honesty and his frankness inspired all who came in contact with him. He was generous and sympathetic in his judgment of others, loyal and unselfish in his devotion to his friends, kind and considerate in his estimation of his neighbors, discharging faithfully every duty committed to him, detesting all hypocrisy and sham and always content to do his work "without the blare of trumpets or the beating of cymbals". He neither thought nor spoke evil of any man, but sought to find in all some good and something worthy of commendation. The warmth of his affection to kindred and

cherished friends was a signal trait, and he was never happier than when entertaining them in his home or doing some deed of neighborly kindness. The success of a friend always brought to him a feeling of genuine satisfaction and delight, and his failure or fall, a feeling of genuine pain and regret. He loved men, and in particular he loved young men, and in return they loved him. He loved to be of service and help to them, and many are indebted to him for their success in life. As a consequence, he still lives in the lives of others, and this after all is practical and ideal immortality. In short, I can truthfully say of him that he was one of the truest, manliest men I ever knew, and whatever his weaknesses—and none of us are without them—they were overshadowed by his virtues.

He never considered even his employees as mere hirelings. By friendly advice and financial help he sought to better their conditions and to make life easier for them. And he enabled numbers of them to change the vocations which otherwise they might have been forced to follow. Only a few days ago one of those to whom he loaned money to enable him to secure a professional education, told me that when he paid him the amount he owed him and thanked him for his kindness, his only reply was, "Now you go and do likewise". This was characteristic of the man.



Today they hold him in grateful remembrance, and accredit their success to him.

He was peculiarly fortunate in his marriage. The devotion of his wife to him was an object lesson to any one who was privileged to be his relative or his friend. Gentle, refined, better educated than he, helpful, with a sweetness of disposition rarely possessed, and with personal traits such as win the love of all who know her, she made him a loving companion and an ideal help-meet. And then, too, her gentleness, her cheerfulness and her charm of manner made her a general favorite with his kindred and with his friends.

There is an old Chinese proverb which says, "It needs a hundred men to make a fortress, but only a woman can make a home". And just such a woman was needed to make him a happy home. A home that "our feet may leave but never our hearts"—a home into which love and sympathy and confidence bring perpetual sunshine. Yes, it was a home of sunshine, ideal in its surroundings, in its influences and its purposes. A home which they kept pure, free from vulgarity or coarseness, from impurities and frivolities, a temple of refinement. A home in which God was honored and the faith of their fathers upheld. Surely nothing else could be required to make it a home "circled in with a sacred fence of contentment, love



and joy''. But the two were needed to make it a complete home.

And in that home they were never happier than when entertaining their friends and kindred. When you entered it, you were made happy in the benediction of their welcome, and when you left it you always felt a desire to return and to again enjoy their generous hospitality. They loved to give pleasure to others and to make others happy. It is not strange, therefore, that they became leaders in the community in which they lived, and that the character and condition of that community was touched by their lives and the influences of their home, influences which, like great electric lights, illuminated other homes with similar ideals and similar virtues.

And then, too, they were not too proud to number among their friends men and women of all classes. They took a friendly interest in all, delighted to visit them and to be visited by them, and whenever the occasion demanded it, "their hands were always outstretched towards the doors of need and suffering, and their feet always turned towards the door of sickness and mourning''. They loved their neighbors and were ever ready to extend them a helping hand.

Unfortunately, they had no children of their own, but they mothered and fathered the children of their less fortunate kindred. They loved children, loved to have them in their home, and loved to contribute to

their education and to their rearing. And what a privilege to be reared in such a home and under the influence of such a home, and what a reward to live in lives made better by their unstinted generosity. In truth they believed that those who gave nothing to their kindred until they died never gave at all.

They loved their home, they loved each other, they loved their friends, they loved humanity and they loved their God. Therefore, I repeat that "These Twain" may be counted among the number whose places will be hard to fill and who leave behind them vacant places of which all who knew them will be deeply sensible.

And now my task is finished. I have described, as best I can—and yet imperfectly—the lives, the loves, the traits and the characteristics of "These Twain". For, after all, these are the things which build the "Home Life" and by which it must be judged and either praised or condemned.

### III. CHURCH

“For I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”

—2 Tim. 1:12.

Willis John and Mary Jennet Lee were born of great church parents in that historic and faithful “Holy Neck” District, in Nansemond County, Virginia. The origin of “Holy Neck” is an Indian place of their worship, where a Quaker house of worship was subsequently erected and, later, an Episcopal church; and, still later, “Holy Neck” Christian Church. It would be difficult to separate the names of Patrick Henry Lee and William Henry Jones from the history of “Holy Neck” Church. The past generation was made sacred by the devotion and service of the Lees and Joneses in that congregation. The significance of “Holy Neck” has not been lowered by the history of the good people who have lived in that district and worshipped in that church. This much is said of the parentage and neighborhood of Willis and Jennie Lee, as a lesson of the value of their origin, both as to parents and neighbors. The best place to be born is of good parents in a good country home; and the best place to lay the foundation for useful church life is in a good country church. Willis and Jennie had both; and they improved their birthright, in both respects, and that is what made them good

and great. Their home and church life were of the best and they continued and improved upon their early beginnings. Their church life was the fruitage of their early beginnings, blossoming into real Christian activity. Holy Neck may well be proud of her children and Berea may well be proud of their names.

Four marks characterize These Twain in relation to their church life:

*Loyalty to Jesus Christ.* Their personal faith and conduct won for them a reputation built upon beautiful Christian character. Their combined personality made their light shine.

It was not through loud profession, nor self-assertion, that they won an enduring place in the confidence, love and esteem of all who knew them. Goodness emanated from their lives as fragrance from flowers, or beauty from sunsets. As Elijah and Elisha "they two went on". II Kings 2:6. Their sweet Christian character, so beautiful and so true, was rooted in their loyalty to Jesus Christ. It was *Christian* character.

*Loyalty to their Local Church.* Berea at Driver, in Lower Parish, Nansemond County, Virginia, was their church. Their loyalty to Berea expressed itself in attendance, financial support, and home hospitality. Voluntary absence from church was unknown to them. When Sunday school and preaching time came, they were in their place; and all who were in

their house, too. Company did not keep them away. As for church support, all they wanted to know was how much was needed to meet the obligation of their church. If others failed, they would make it good. The church had to be kept in good order, the grounds clean. It had the same care as their own splendid Town Point mansion by the broad Nansemond River. The church was God's house, their house, dear to their hearts as life; the sanctuary of their loyal souls, the "house of prayer." It seemed to be in their thought, their hearts, their daily lives. God was first in their lives, and Berea was God's house.

*Loyalty to their Denomination.* While loyal to their local church in a marked degree, they were not local in any restricted sense. Their interest, their prayers, their service, and their gifts went out as far as their church went; yea, as far as the Kingdom of God went. They were not provincial in any relation of life. The union of their lives and the unity of their aims broadened and liberalized their views, their aspirations, their intercourse, and their relations to the denomination. They believed implicitly in the principles of the Christian Church, and they made those principles a part of their daily life. With firm convictions on all moral, social, and religious questions, they accorded to all others the "right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience" equally with themselves. While devoted and loyal to their denomi-

nation, they were liberal and Christian toward other denominations, and *their* work. They loved the people of God, and they "loved their neighbors as themselves." Their local church, Berea, which they loved with rare devotion, was to them a unit in the denomination which always enjoyed their larger love. Their attitude toward the denomination was an unconscious example for others; for true devotion to the local church can not be maintained without loyalty to the denomination of which it forms a part. This larger relationship of church members to the denomination was not only characteristic of Willis and Jennie Lee, but was the proof of their larger Christian value as followers of Jesus Christ. Their splendid home and prosperous Nansemond River truck farm seemed to represent the faith and hospitality of their own lives. The very acres by the river seemed to partake of the liberal character of their own souls. The tides of the ocean which told daily of regular obedience to the law of God at their back door, seemed to repeat the regular heartbeats of their lives, in ebb and flow, in relation to their church. Sooner would the music of the tides die than the music of such sweet Christian lives cease.

*Loyalty to Church Institutions.* They did not live or serve for themselves alone, but for Jesus Christ and His church; and that did not mean for the church, as a church, but for all its institutions and activities;

its literature, its missions, its orphanage, its college, and whatever was undertaken by the church for the advancement of the cause of Christ, and the welfare of mankind. All had their confidence, their prayers, their good word, and their financial support. There is not an institution in the church now in operation for educational or benevolent purposes that does not have somewhere in it, written in letters of gold, the name of Lee—for Willis and Jennie were *one* in all their work.

In the "Private Laws of North Carolina for 1889," chapter 216, the name of W. J. Lee is recorded as one of the fifteen charter members of the Board of Trustees of Elon College; and he remained a faithful member of the Board until his death, May 20, 1919. Records show that the first *public* appeal for funds to aid in the erection of the first Administration building, which was destroyed by fire, January 18, 1923, was made by Rev. Dr. William S. Long, the first President, at Berea Christian Church, Nansemond County, Virginia, of which the Lees were members. The subscription that day was \$635.05 and, of that sum W. J. Lee subscribed \$250.00. When ten thousand dollars more was needed, later, he gave one thousand dollars. From the day the college was opened their loyalty expressed itself in sending students, giving money, and helping the institution in all the ways they could. There per-



sonal loyalty and their financial loyalty were twins. In this respect they were models finer than the masterpieces of Parian marble carved by Phidias or Michel Angelo. Their loyalty was not expressed by single liberal donations to church institutions, but by systematic repetitions of financial contributions, even as God bestowed upon their splendid truck farm annual harvests. There was no "once for all", nor "all for once" gifts to denominational enterprises; but they gave "as God prospered them." Bible teaching was their standard of giving; time, talent, money, and service.

Willis J. Lee was a member of a committee of three appointed by the Convention to locate the Christian Orphanage which was located at Elon College, and served as a trustee of the Orphanage from 1902 to 1906. While Willis and Jennie had no children of their own, they opened doors of opportunity for the children without the care of parents.

Their lives were "modest" as well as "models." Their large service never embarrassed less fortunate members of the church; but all was done in such a modest and Christian-like way that it really inspired others to do their part willingly, graciously, and liberally. They helped to teach the lesson that small givers can be liberal givers. They taught that lesson by the Christian manner in which they made their large contributions to the church. They loved more



than they professed, did more than they said, lived better than they knew, and were leaders unconscious of their worth. They wrote their history in the roads they travelled, in the lives they touched, in the church where they worshipped, and the denomination they loved. The memory of them will be fragrant with the flowers of their youth, the fruit of their mature life, and the united service of their membership in the church of Jesus Christ.

Mrs. Lee still lives and carries on the good work which they did in His name so generously and successfully while they loved and labored together. It might be said of Jennie as it was said of Elisha, after Elijah was taken up to heaven, that "the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." 2 Kings 2:15.

## THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

“The end of Christianity is two-fold, a perfect man in a perfect society.”  
—*Gladden.*

News of the death of Willis J. Lee came by wire as a shock to the Board of Trustees of Elon College, while in session, May 20, 1919, and the following was passed by the Board, for record and publication:

1. That we record our sincere appreciation of his Christian character and faithful service to the college and the cause of Christ. No man among us has been more generous and faithful. He was modest and humble, yet brave and strong, in every field where duty called him. His counsel was wise, his example worthy of emulation.

2. That we bow in humble submission to the will of God who doeth all things well. We thank our Heavenly Father for extending his life well beyond three score years and ten, and we devoutly pray that God may raise up some worthy successor in our beloved Zion.

3. That we extend to Mrs. W. J. Lee and the family our sincere sympathy in their great bereavement and pray that His divine grace may be sufficient in this dark hour.

4. That a copy of these resolutions be entered upon the records of the college, a copy sent to Mrs. Lee, and a copy sent to the Christian Sun for publication.

## IV. FRIENDS

“The only reward of virtue is virtue:  
The only way to have a friend is to be one.”

—Emerson.

“We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken”. The sage who wrote that line may not have had all peoples in mind, but he certainly revealed the inner life and attitude of some. “These Twain”, Willis John Lee and Mary Jennet Lee, were illustrious examples of the Emersonian philosophy. There is a further unfolding of this same philosophy that applies in a remarkable degree to These Twain; “Our intellectual and active powers increase with our affections”. Those who knew best these two personalities often wondered at their keen intellectual powers, knowing that scholarship, and culture in the schools, could not account for these. Their affections, favors and friendships whetted their intellectual and active powers. They had hidden in their hearts more kindness than their words could ever express. They knew the worth and meaning of, though it is safe to assert that neither could define, Friendship. They learned by loving. Their friendship was deeper than their language or their learning.

Without children themselves, their house was the children's home. They did not think in terms of a house or a table sufficient only for their needs. Chil-

dren were to be considered. The five-room house in which they lived for years was not large enough nor the two stories of it high enough, to shelter and to afford ample room for the romping of children's feet. They moved out the old and built the new with its dozen or more ample rooms and three stories. They did not build this spacious house for themselves. They built it as an expression of their abiding friendship for others, for the young in particular. This writer has been not infrequently in that home when there were twelve or sixteen children seemingly in possession of the place and not for a day only, but for a week or weeks at a time. All three stories of the ample house, and the great lawn, and the whole place seemed to be in possession of happy youth and childhood. "These Twain" loved children and lured them to their house, and gave them the loving hospitality of fond parenthood.

The books tell us that one of the invariable elements and abiding qualities of friendship is *tenderness*. There never was a true friend who did not have the element, the trait, the eternal characteristic of *tenderness*. If a student or historian of the future should inquire as to why "These Twain" gathered about them unnumbered children, or rather why unnumbered children gathered about them, the answer will be found, and the problem solved, in the solemn avowal that "These Twain" each and both

had tenderness that abided in their hearts always, and never failed nor faded at any time or place. Brave, courageous, strong, heroic, busy with affairs, cumbered with serving, no occupation or engagement could obscure or suppress this trait and element of *tenderness in their nature*. "Happy is the house that shelters a friend". Here indeed was a house built by "These Twain" that sheltered not only two, but many friends, because to have friends one must be a friend and these knew how to be friends. It is not without significance that Willis John Lee, ever and always helped by the hearty support and cooperation of Mary Jennet Lee, for "These Twain" worked together, was on the first Building Committee of the Christian Orphanage, which committee located that institution at its present site, Elon College, N. C., and to his dying day there was no institution or enterprise nearer and dearer to his heart and her heart than the Christian Orphanage. Themselves without children, they never forgot the children without fathers and mothers. They could not forget. The urge and the pull of a tenderness which is at the heart of true friendship would not let them forget. One of the first items always read in this family when the church paper was received was that about the orphanage and the children there. Besides being liberal contributors to this institution, at every appeal of church and Sunday school, the orphanage was remembered

by a liberal donation in the last will and testament of Willis John Lee.

Not to children only, but to youth also, especially to ambitious and promising youth, was this abiding friendship shown. Even their most intimate acquaintances do not know how many young people "These Twain" helped. Their liberality put many within reach of a college education and preparation for life. A memorial to their friendship for youth stands on their farm not a mile away from their home. It is a neat, nice school house, by the side of the road, built and sustained by "These Twain" that the children in their own home, and other neighbors' children, might receive the benefits of school. A school teacher or governess lived in their home several years to train and to direct the mental development of the childhood that came to tarry or to live there a time. And that friendship and favor followed these and other children and sustained them till they had finished their college course. It is safe to say for the first twenty-five years of the history of Elon College "These Twain" supported, from their private purse, an average of one college student a year. In several instances this support was a donation, in others a loan to those who were unable to pay their own way and had nothing but their own character and word to secure the repayment of such loans. This, however, but poorly indicates their friendship for grow-

ing and promising youth, for it may be truly said that Elon College was their joy and their pride. From the day of its founding till the hour of his death Willis John Lee was a member of its Board of Trustees, as has already been pointed out in this volume, and no farm duties or business obligations ever prevented his attending business sessions of the trustees; and no appeals for funds for this institution ever passed him unheeded and unhelped. One of the last acts of his earthly career was to see to it after a certain business transaction had turned out well, that \$5,000.00 thus accruing unexpectedly should be given to Elon College. Nothing else but friendship for youth, growing and promising manhood and womanhood, could have prompted such generous attitude and conduct. Though they had no sons or daughters to graduate, few graduating classes received their diplomas the first twenty-five years of the college, while they both had health and strength, but that they themselves witnessed with beaming faces the token of youthful achievement, signified by the giving and receiving of college diplomas and conferring degrees.

There is no more fertile soil for the growth of rare and royal fruitage in this world than the field of developing friendship. In order to have friends one must be a friend. This will explain how "These Twain" came to achieve so much and in the lives of



so many. They cultivated well the fertile and fruitful field of friendship. They themselves sought to be friends to others. They cultivated with such intensity the farm on which they lived, it came to be proverbially famous and fertile. So likewise they cultivated with equal intensity the field of their own affections and the soil thereof produced the fruits of rare and royal friendship.

Not only was this friendship manifested to children and youth; it was demonstrated, in a most remarkable manner, to employees and dependents of every class and kind about them. On the day of the death of Willis John Lee the saddest scene was on the farm and among the employees. One Negro man with tears and trembling lips said, "The best friend I ever had is gone. I have worked for him fifty years now, and he always paid me promptly and treated me like a man and a friend. I will love him to my dying day". Of course he would. The world round about knows true friends, for they get to themselves an attachment and devotion that is divine. Friendship has the divine atmosphere and produces the divine attachment.

"The only reward of virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be one". That is a wise saying and worthy of emphatic interpretation and acceptance. Ever and always, those who have friends are the ones who are, and have been friends. And



friendship like virtue and charity must begin at home, but it does not stay there. True friendship is virile and vigorous and spreads its pinions in many directions. Institutions, interests, and enterprises worthy of patronage and support receive the favor and sustenance of friends. There was no institution of charity or benevolence that did not find a friend in "These Twain". Church, orphanage, college, schools, missions, all factors and movements that were worthy and meant the betterment of their community and the world found willing patrons and liberal helpers, and loyal supporters in the hearts of These Immortal Twain.

It was the writer's high privilege, because of intimate association and a certain marital relationship, to know, as few others could, something of the height and depth, the length and breadth, the intensity and the abidingness of the friendship of "These Twain". Through a period of years and under the most varied vicissitudes of fortune and misfortune he was permitted to intrude into the sacred premises of this family life and into the individual experiences of "These Twain". In all life's experiences, it shall be recorded here that he never found two people of nobler impulses, of deeper and more abiding tenderness, of more kindly interest and consideration than these hearts displayed. By day and by night, through winter and through summer, through prosperity and advers-

ity, they cultivated in their own hearts a friendship that was divine. This friendship will be more enduring than any marble shaft, printed volume or written page, to their memory. There may never be built any noble structure to honor their names, any bronze busts or tablets, any marble monument to perpetuate their memory in the earth. This however can be truthfully said, that they erected for themselves a monument that time will not waste nor can the ages destroy. Their true epitaph may be written in the one word *friendship*—friendship and devotion, first of all to their God; then to their church, to the hundreds of children that came and went through their home; and to the youth and manhood and womanhood which their rich and liberal lives were permitted to touch, to help, and to inspire. “These Twain” indeed were friends, and this will be their mark and monument when history is forgotten and the finger of time has corroded all other monuments erected to their names. Willis John Lee, Mary Jennet Lee, “These Twain”, let the reader who would interpret the secret and glory of their lives learn the meaning of the one word that made their lives great, and a blessing to all mankind—*friendship*.

## HOW BEST REMEMBERED

“Need these the praise of the love-written record,  
The name and the epitaph graven on stone?  
The things we have lived for—let them be our story  
We ourselves but remembered by what we have done.”

—*Anon.*













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